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A NEW LOOK AT THE LINGUAL APPROACH.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS WHO STRESS THE AUDIOLINGUAL APPROACH, ESPECIALLY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, NEED TO BE AWARE OF CURRENT PROBLEMS, PRACTICES, AND PHILOSOPHIES. USE OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM MUST NEITHER OVERRIDE STUDENT COMPREHENSION OR PERMIT NEGLECT OF ANY OF THE FOUR BASIC SKILLS. CONTINUOUS INSERVICE TRAINING CAN DEVELOP MORE EFFECTIVE AND STIMULATING TEACHING WHILE FOSTERING DESIRABLE ARTICULATION BETWEEN TEACHING AND SUPERVISION. WELL EQUIPPED CLASSROOMS ARE AS NECESSARY AS EXPENSIVE LABORATORIES, BUT EFFECTIVE USE OF BOTH CALLS FOR AN INCREASED SUPPLY OF CAREFULLY PREPARED TAPES AND PROGRAMS. IN ORDER TO MEET THE CHALLENGES, PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS SHOULD RECEIVE SOUND GROUNDING IN STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS IN THEIR SPECIFIC LANGUAGE FIELD. STATE AND LOCAL BOARDS SHOULD PROVIDE SUMMER STUDY GRANTS ABROAD FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOLARSHIPS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LANGUAGE ABILITY. MAINTAINING WITHIN A DISCIPLINED FRAMEWORK A DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN INTEGRATION OF CLASSROOM WORK AND LABORATORY PRACTICE, ENCOURAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE AND ACCURACY OF EXPRESSION, RECOGNITION OF SUPERIOR ABILITY AND AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEMS OF SLOW LEARNERS PLACES GREAT DEMANDS UPON THE CREATIVITY OF THE TEACHER. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "LANGUAGE FEDERATION BULLETIN," VOLUME 18, NUMBER 1, SEPTEMBER 1966. (GJ)

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A New Look at the Lingual Approach

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(A Keynote Address to the Long Island Association of Foreign Language Chairmen and Supervisors, May 1966)

There is certainly no more exciting profession today than that of the language teacher. In a world whose very existence is dependent upon communication, understanding and appreciation; in a society where we note increasingly that the humanities must be a full partner if the machines are to be used for the common welfare; in a universe where difference and diversity can but add to the wealth and cultural enrichment of each of us, the language teacher has a key role to play: a role of discovery, a role of fulfillment; a role of germination and a role of fruitation; a role of self-understanding; a role of self-appreciation; a role of interpretation and of dissemination; the language teacher cultivates not only his own garden but the vast domains of friends, neighbors, brothers, partners, the understood, the misunderstood and the misunderstanding to the north, east, south and west in a shrinking world where the I and the You must become the We.

If we have fumbled the ball in the past because we were tonguetied and inarticulate, if we were guilty of intellectual snobbery because we catered only to the intellectually elite; if we have been derelict in not opening up all the stops on the organ so we could see the whole rather than the principal parts of irregular verbs; if we have been guilty of taking pinwheel steps instead of the giant steps which lie within our capablities, it is only because we are just now starting to utilize our inherent capacities and abilities to contribute to experience. We have moved from isolationism to internationalism; we will move from dialogue to fluency; we will progress from mimicry to creativity.

The language revolution might have knocked us for a loop. It was fraught with the dangers of leaders with untrained troops; weapons which were rusted and obsolete; panaceas which were both purgative, primitive and often palliative; bandwagons which produced faddists, followers and a jargon of linguistics both applied and pure which all but benumbed the practitioner.

How then should we evaluate the audio-lingual approach and what are the prospects for its future?

There can be no doubt that the four-skill thrust has given to language learning the impact of a guided missile. The breakthrough in the American society of language as total communication, of language as culture, of language as the synthesis of human behavior, is a major one. But because of the very electricity which the approach generates, we have had our share of blown fuses, power failures and electrocutions.

On the plus side we must certainly concede that the public image of the language profession has blossomed; that the professional fraternity has opened up the front parlor to us; that the clientele is more numerous, the offerings more plentiful; the budget treatment more equitable; and the national sanction status-elevating.

We are doing well, make no mistake about it, and it is precisely because we are doing so well that we must be vigilant to make our product the best possible; to make the goals a reality; to constantly examine the emerging curriculum; to refine the tools and the textbooks; the training of teachers must be increasingly improved; language supervisors and administrators must be permitted to function in terms of their competencies; and in-service training must be a continuous process. Research efforts must be continuing and continuous. We need to make sure that every link in the language experience is strong, for no link in that system can be stronger than any one of its constituent parts.

There is no discipline in which the step by step mastery of tchniques is so bound from level to level.

It is obvious that we have made many mistakes in our zeal and desire to change; in our misunderstandings and faulty interpretations; in our haste to jump in and get our feet wet.

Wherein have been some of the principal problems?

Too many teachers are still tied to the textbook and often see the totality of experience within that

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one book. Instead of a master one becomes a slave. That beautiful cultural island becomes Unit 56 and the completion of those nine units has created a stranglehold which often robs the vitality, the vision and the variety which are essentials in the art of teaching.

The use of the foreign language has permeated the profession as it should have, but the equating of the direct method with the audio-lingual approach is utterly fallacious. A youngster who said "Bonjour" all year long and finally had the nerve to ask the teacher what it meant is a victim of that error. We are dealing with American children, an American psychology, an American school system. The crucial point is of course that the foreign tongue is the language of the classroom but that the pedagogical function requires that there be comprehension and where necessary that elaboration should be forthcoming quickly, spontaneously, and without a guilt complex because the native language has been used by the teacher. And let us remember that we serve all children: the bright, the average and the slower learners and we are cognizant of the clientele we serve, both in techniques and curriculum of choice.

Since oral work is high priority on early levels and a continuum on higher levels, it is obvious that the teacher must meet minimal standards of speech proficiency. What is more tragic than to have a FLES specialist whose phonology is deficient, whose structural accuracy is wanting, whose fluency is contrived and artificial! We need to train such specialists, certify them and make efforts to attract qualified students to this field.

We practitioners know how thoroughly exhausting it is to teach a full schedule of Level I classes. Administrators of schools and language supervisors must schedule staff with great care so that the factor of human exhaustion and its simplications are carefully weighed. All teachers and administrators need to recognize that Level I is as important as Level IV and that it takes as much skill to do a superior job in one area as the other. Class size should certainly not exceed twenty-five and wherever possible no teacher should have more than three Level I classes. Individual work demands it and supervisors must take leadership in interpreting the necessity to administrative personnel.

Interpretation of language as an academic discipline is a continuing function of the language teacher and supervisor. In an age when the masses are being pushed into science and math irrespective of aptitude or interest, it behooves us to identify those students who should be given the opportunity to take two languages and I would hope that on the junior high school level that one of those languages would be Latin. There must be a continuing dialogue with the guidance staff to present our progress, goals, ideals and we must try to transmit our enthusiasm to this key personnel. Guidance staff and administration should be invited to the language class, the language laboratory, the language luncheon club and be given insight into the cultural island which is such a dynamic! And let us bring them into the slower track classes as well to show that these youngsters when presented materials and methods designed for them may succeed very well, and enjoy with anticipation the opportunity for language experience.

I should like to return to the question of in-service training. There is no doubt that the strongest in-service training possible is on-the-job supervision: that process which is a shared experience between two individuals who come prepared to utilize the process for specific goals and objectives. In too many schools language supervisors are not permitted to evaluate staff members; in too many schools language supervisors are given too many classes to teach so that both supervision and curriculum development can in no way be satisfactorily managed; in too many schools the top administration delegates responsibility without authority. These are areas which must be improved upon if we are to render appropriate service to our teachers and help in their professional development.

The problem of evaluation continues to be a weak link in the audio-lingual approach. A good many teachers do not give appropriate weight to the speech and aural comprehension skills in their evaluation procedures. Certainly students should be rated for their laboratory performance and should be graded for their classroom speech activities. The New York State Syllabus grades appropriate guidelines for weights on the four skills in the four and six year sequences. One reason for the failure to adequately factor the speech proficiency is the difficulty in devising adequate measuring rods. Needless to say until such time as our New York State Regents Examination contains an oral testing section or makes provision for it, there is a serious deficiency in that instrument. The announcement that the College Board achievement test in language is almost certain to include the auditory comprehension test as an integral part of the examination certainly is progress, and those who are acquainted with the four skill MLA Cooperative Tests would certainly be prone to say that we have here the best achievement tests on the market. Yet much more needs to be done in this area and we must certainly measure what we are teaching.

If the language classroom is to be a cultural island, then certainly there must be available visual aids, machinery and materials which help to transplant the individual into that culture. There are still too many language departments which lag behind when the annual budgetary pie is divided. The expensive laboratory has high eye appeal and is often part of the milieu, but the necessary programs to carry on the laboratory activities, are often overlooked. The audio-lingual classroom should have not only the overhead projector, the slide machine and tape recorder, but also the programs and materials to feed into them.

The Language Laboratory is no longer regarded as I once heard it described in derogatory fashion as the "creator of the tapeworms." But its use is still hardly what it should be. It is my conviction that outside of class laboratory work should be

cultivated just as outside of class science laboratories are required. I further believe that the frequency of laboratory participation of the student should be related to his proficiency in speech and aural comprehension and thus individualized. The production of taped material which can stimulate spontaneity of speech, when students are ready for such activities, remains a challenge. Teachers need, too, to program more varied laboratory programs for their students.

One of the hotly debated questions in scholastic circles is the question of theories of learning relative to language study. Should cognitive theory replace habit-forming over-learning mimicry? Should analysis precede example? Should example be followed by analysis? There is no doubt that both theories are relevant to audio-lingual learning, that both need to be utilized and that factors of time and place, and degree of contrast with the native language are essential elements in the validity of the approaches.

Certainly no greater impact has been made on language teaching than that of structural linguistics. The ability to understand the principles, the ability to construct suitable drills, the ability to proceed from the automation of drills to spontaneity in reality situations are all vital considerations which must become part of the impedimenta of the language teacher. Too many teacher training institutions are still deficient in presenting structural linguistics as applied to a specific language field as part of the curriculum for the prospective language teacher.

One of the most delicate questions is how to achieve spontaneity of response in the classroom with the heavy emphasis on overlearning of structures thru drill work in early levels. Response to picture stimuli, free discourse between pairs before the class and in small groups within the class, the luncheon clubs, the language clubs, reporting on topics selected from that magic box on the teacher's desk, a conservation between teacher and student on a given topic are all techniques which are being experimented with and refined.

Too often is there a mistaken notion that audio-lingual approaches are splendid for 1st and 2nd level activities but that reading and writing take over on levels 3 and 4. While it is true that the amount of time devoted to the four skills differs from level to level, it is certainly true that all four skills, once past the strictly audio-lingual first level presentation, have a place in the program. Too often do we note that audio-lingual activity, particularly the lingual, is neglected on levels 3 and 4. A more delicate balance needs to be effected in our teaching so that reentry is a constant in the program. The student must continue to be exposed to the four

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skills if he is to be able to master them. The primary duty of the high school program as I see it is to send the students onto college thoroughly grounded in the control of the language.

Language teachers need to have the opportunity to speak the language they are teaching outside of the classroom setting if they are to maintain their language competence and improve upon it. The extraordinary opportunities of the Second Level Institutes are a step in this direction. Local Boards of Education should be encouraged to send language teachers abroad with a view to improving their effectiveness for teaching specific courses of study as a possible summer study project. The State Legislature would do well to provide grants for selected language teachers to engage in area studies abroad in countries in which the target language is spoken.

The problem of articulation from level to level continues to be a focal point for improvement. We have all been aware of the fact that until the very recent present students who were trained audio-lingually were often exposed to college language classrooms where the target language was rarely employed. This sad but true non-articulated state is not completely eradicated, but progress is being made. The utilization of the MLA Cooperative Tests for college placement is increasing and a deeper understanding of the four skill training program of the secondary school is resulting in revised curricula. The secondary school language personnel are also increasingly sensitive to the criticism that students need to know how to read and write as well as speak and understand.

One of the exciting aspects of the audio-lingual approach is that lower-level students are able to succeed on levels 1 and 2 to a much greater extent than under previous methods. The ability to mimic is not confined to high IQ's. While the emphasis on writing and reading remains at a level which does not eliminate such individuals, they are able to make splendid progress and enjoy a significant cultural experience. Grouping makes the experience even more appropriate, particularly on the second level. Some of these individuals will be able to go on to grouped level 3 section with a special curriculum.

One of the problems which arises with the audio-lingual approach is the occasional youngster whose dependence on the printed page makes it most difficult for him to survive in the purely audio-lingual phase. We used to insist on a fairly lengthy interval of time before the reading of printed material. Current thinking has reduced that time in terms of the student's level of interest, the teacher's ability to carry on the process productively, special factors in group composition as well as the orthographic-sound discrepancies the language presents. Wherever a special problem exists, it should be dealt with as such and individual remedial work effected. Just as the lab provides an excellent opportunity for the youngster who has been absent to practice the material after the teacher has presented it appropriately, so too should it be used remedially for those needing special attention. It may be desirable to give an individual having a special need for the printed word this opportunity in advance of others if it contributes to his progress and psychological well-being.

The development of the audio-lingual approach has certainly brought vitality to the language classroom so that it is an active experience for each youngster. Use of choral techniques and their variations have enabled students to make hundreds of utterances each class period. There is the pepper and salt of acting out situations to fire his imagination. The approach lends itself well to the injection of life experiences common to the learner. The student feels a part of things, "en famille." He comes to class each day ready to give a performance; all will be involved and the pace will be brisk. The cast will need to be ready on cue. It's exhilarating when the conductor gives the signals.

What is dynamic for the youngster is equally dynamic for the teacher. The balancing of the four skills, the integration of laboratory materials, the stimulation of response by group and individual at a steady pace, the role of model, Judge and critic all in a disciplined framework yet through which high creativity is possible, keeps the teacher truly hopping.

The New Key of yesterday has become Standard Operating Procedure of today. The problems to which I have alluded are all in process of study, research and experimentation. They will be solved. New ones will arise. The visual will accompany the audio in the lab; the audio-lingual textbooks will have revised editions; graded readers will increase in number; increased numbers of youngsters will go abroad and apply their knowledge; teachers will be better prepared for the tasks ahead at the teacher training institutions; some college teachers may teach advanced courses in the high schools and some high school teachers beginning courses in the colleges. Administrators of language programs will become full partners in the administrative cabinet. Language proficiency will become a measure of scholastic competence. Scholarships will increase for the talented in language from the high school to the college level.

In conclusion may I say we are in an exciting profession in which the future looms even larger. We have the opportunity to develop a better world, to bring person to person, culture to culture, group to group closer together. As practitioners of what we preach we have the rare opportunity to be the inspirational example. We accept that challenge with humility, dedication and a sense of mission.

NAMES IN THE NEWS

Miss Remunda Cadoux, (Christopher Colombus H.S.) NYC, was re-elected as Regional Representative for Region 2 (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania) of the Department of FL of the NEA.

Dr. Dora S. Bashour has been elected President of the AATF, Metropolitan Chapter, for 1966-1968.

Mr. Leo Benardo has been appointed Director of FL of the NYC Public Schools.